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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1190
RUEHQQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6492
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SUBJECT: COLOMBIANS REJECT CHAVEZ' PROPOSALS ON FARC AND
RALLY AROUND GOC

REF: CARACAS 47

Summary

¶1. The GOC rejected President Chavez' January 10 statement urging that the FARC and ELN be removed from international lists of terrorist groups and receive "belligerent status" from the international community. President Uribe later said he would be willing to seek the FARC's removal from international terrorism lists, but only after the group ceased terrorist acts and showed its commitment to a real peace process. Former-Presidents Pastrana and Gaviria, as well the leftist Polo Democratico, supported the GOC stance. The European Union, as well as individual European and Latin countries, also ruled out Chavez' proposal. Meanwhile, on January 14, the FARC kidnapped five Colombians and a Norwegian in Choco. End summary.

Chavez' Proposal to Give FARC Belligerent Status

¶2. On January 10, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called on the international community to give the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) "belligerent status" and to remove the group from international lists of terrorist organizations (reftel). Chavez called the FARC and National Liberation Army (ELN) "real Armies that occupy space in Colombia." He added, "they have a political project, they have a bolivarian project that is respected here." He concluded, the FARC and ELN "are not terrorists." Chavez' statements followed comments by Venezuelan Interior Minister Ramon Rodriguez Chacin to FARC fighters during the January 10 recovery of hostages Clara Rojas and Consuelo Gonzalez de Perdomo that, "we are very conscious of your struggle . . . you can count on us."

¶3. Chavez expanded on his logic January 13, arguing that if the GOC recognized the FARC as a belligerent, the group would

be required to reject kidnappings and terrorist acts against civilians and accept the Geneva Conventions. Senator Piedad Cordoba on January 14, called the FARC a "political reality" and said she supported the Chavez proposal. Prior to Chavez' comments, Cordoba had previously said she would travel to Europe to lobby the EU to remove the FARC from its terrorism list.

GOC Calmly Rejects Proposal

¶4. The GOC immediately rejected Chavez' comments in a communique issued January 11. The GOC called all illegal groups in Colombia terrorists, and said it would not accept belligerent status for the FARC or ELN or calls to lift the groups' terrorist designations. Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, who Chavez singled out for criticism in making his FARC remarks, said, "Chavez has finally revealed himself." The GOC's position has received support from the European Union, as well as individual European and Latin governments.

¶5. Uribe said at the January 14 inauguration of Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom in Guatemala City that he would be willing to seek the FARC's removal from international terrorism lists, but only after the group ceased all terrorist activities and showed its commitment to a genuine peace process. Uribe also used the opportunity to explain the GOC's position to Colom, Mexican President Felipe Calderon, and Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa.

Wide Support for GOC

¶6. Colombian political parties across the ideological spectrum rejected Chavez's remarks and supported the GOC. Former President Pastrana called Chavez' proposal "blackmail" and offered to lobby the Europeans to oppose Chavez' proposal. Former-President and opposition Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria backed the GOC and said, "what we really need is for Chavez to reject and condemn kidnapping." Gaviria also insisted that Cordoba not defend the FARC or seek the groups removal from terrorism lists. The Liberals will call Cordoba to explain her position to the party the week of January 20. Polo Democratico leader Carlos Gavira condemned the FARC for its terrorist acts. Colombian print and broadcast media labeled the Chavez statements interference in Colombian internal affairs, and several commentators urged the GOC to recall its ambassador to Caracas.

¶7. Meanwhile, on January 14, the GOC reported that five Colombians and one Norwegian (identified as Professor Alf Onshuus Nino from the University of the Andes in Bogota) were kidnapped by the FARC's 57th front in the Pacific-coast Department of Choco.

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